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SUBJECT: VIOLENT SHOOTINGS SPUR BRITISH COLUMBIA CRACKDOWN ON GANGS,
GUNS

11. A series of violent shootings has spurred intense action by British Columbia and Vancouver area city governments to address gangs and the tools they use. The actions reflect community outrage at gang warfare that has left 14 dead so far this year and has turned shopping mall parking lots and suburban residential neighborhoods into battle grounds. BC Premier Gordon Campbell announced an additional 168 police officers and 10 special prosecutors will be committed to work on gang activities at a cost of C\$69 million over three years. BC also announced new steps to deal with gang tools: the establishment of a new weapons unit, Provincial administration of Canadian firearms regulations, the regulation of body armor, and the outlawing of vehicle armoring.

12. Other measures proposed by the province include requiring health facilities to report treatment of any patients with gunshot wounds and shutting down weapons retailers who fail to secure their facilities against break-ins or are unable to account for lost or stolen firearms. BC Solicitor General Van Dongen told reporters his office would be releasing a report within the next week outlining an action plan for removing illegal guns from criminals. In addition to provincial and city measures, the BC Premier, Solicitor General and Attorney General called for Canadian federal action on widening the wiretap provisions for the Criminal Code, a measure already in the works in Ottawa. Federal Public Safety Minister Peter Van Loan was in Vancouver on February 16 and referred to the region as Canada's Gang Capital because of the large concentration of gangs and sophisticated gang activity.

13. The crackdown took place just one day after gunfire erupted in a suburban Burnaby neighborhood. The RCMP arrested four men and was looking for a fifth, possibly injured, assailant. Two days after the announcement, a woman was shot to death while driving in a Surrey neighborhood with her 4-year old son in the back seat. Police have yet to determine if she was a gang target, but the killing has all the marks of recent shootings. The week of February 2 two men were killed in separate attacks, both taking place in popular mall parking lots in Langley and Surrey near large crowds of shoppers. The police have taken the highly unusual step of indentifying gang members who are potential targets and warning the public to steer clear of these individuals. The Red Scorpion gang has been targeted in several of the recent shootings and its key members, including three brothers, have had their pictures plastered in newspapers and on television for days. The Bacon brothers, who live in the town of Abbotsford near the Washington state border, have criminal histories involving drug trafficking and weapons and assault charges. The police have put open tails on these individuals as a means of deterrence.

14. The Vancouver area experienced a spate of gang killings in 12008. The 2008 homicide number for the entire metro Vancouver area was 59 dead, with 30 attributed directly to gang violence. By comparison, Portland, which is slightly larger than Vancouver, had 27 homicides. The current violence appears to be a continuation of the 2008 mayhem. Experts speculate that a shortage of heroin, and its consequent increase in price, plus turf battles are the main drivers of the gang violence. News reports are linking the most recent killings to a turf battle between the Red Scorpions and another lower mainland group, the

UN gang.

15. Comment: The Premier's actions come amidst growing criticism over a perceived lack of coordinated action to combat the lower mainland's gang problem. Vancouver Mayor Gregor Robertson has renewed calls for the creation of one regional police force that would be better able to handle the cross-jurisdictional nature of gang activities. The recent violence will also play into the hands of the Harper government as it readies to release new legislation on wiretaps, particularly as it pertains to the internet, most likely a key impetus to Van Loan's recent visit to the region. End comment.

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